

## THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

Mass Media Week in Belarus

August 29 – September 04, 2011

***The Belarusian Association of Journalists sent a petition to the Presidential Administration with a request to release from custody the journalists and BAJ members, imprisoned after the events of December 19, 2011. The list of media workers includes Dzmitry Bandarenka, Aliaksandr Atroshchankau, and Pavel Seviaryniets. The journalist association regards the journalists' prosecution as restriction of freedom of speech, ensured by the Constitution of Belarus (articles 33 and 34). The BAJ signers drew attention of official authorities to the poor state of D. Bandarenka's health. (The media worker has undergone an operation on his spine recently.)***

***Despite the BAJ appeal, D. Bandarenka was sent to Mahilou penal colony No. 15 on September 1, 2011.***

As reported on **August 29, 2011**, the Public Prosecutor's Office for Mahilou region refused to consider an appeal, filed by *Anatol Sanatsienka*, "Bobruyskiy Kuryer" Editor-in-chief and returned (!) the letter to him by mail. It's worth mentioning that the Editor intended to complain against illegal actions of local police officers, who detained two correspondents of "Bobruyskiy Kuryer" weekly – Viktor Kachan and Viktor Masalovich – on July 6, 2011. The First Deputy Procurator for Mahilou region Pimashkou informed the Editor that he had to confirm his authority to represent the editorial members' interests in the Public Prosecutor's Office. A. Sanatsienka underscored the demand was absurd, since he was the detained journalists' employer.

It is worth reminding that the journalists were detained, while reporting from a civil protest action in Lenin Square in Babruysk. The journalists spent a night in the pre-trial isolation ward. Both of them were fined 5 base amounts on the following day.

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The Belarusian Association of Journalists Moved for a Release of D. Bandarenka, A. Atroshchankau, and P. Sieviarynets

The journalist association sent a letter to the Presidential Administration on *August 31, 2011*.

"Taking into consideration the granted pardon to a number of people, convicted for participation in the events of December 19, 2010 as well as a statement, delivered by the President of Belarus on the necessity to start a broad dialogue in the country, we call on you to initiate the release from custody of journalists and BAJ members Alaksandr Atroshchankau and Dzmitry Bandarenka, imprisoned within the abovementioned case, as well as Pavel Seviarynets, sentenced to restriction of liberty", BAJ leaders underscored in the letter of appeal. "The organization regards their criminal prosecution as restriction of freedom of expression, guaranteed by the Constitution of Belarus", they added.

Moreover, the Belarusian Association of Journalists drew attention to the recent operation, undergone by Dzmitry Bandarenka in custody, and stressed that "further serving of his sentence may exert the most negative impact on the state of his health".

The letter was signed by the BAJ Chairperson Zhanna Litvina on behalf of BAJ Board.

In the meanwhile, Dzmitry Bandarenka was transferred to a penal colony. "It was done in secret. The political prisoner's relatives were not informed about that," the "Charter97" Web-site noted on September 1, 2011.

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As reported on **September 2, 2011**, the Public Prosecutor's Office for Chyhunachny City District of Homiel justified repeatedly the actions, committed by Alaksandr Koshman, the Head of City District Department of Interior. The latter had detained a BelaPAN correspondent Alena Germanovich at the time of a 'silent protest action' in Homiel on July 3, 2011.

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The body of **Aleh Byabenin**, one of the founders and leaders of the web-site [www.charter97.org](http://www.charter97.org), was found in the noose a year ago on September 3, 2010 at his country house in the village of Pyarhurava, Dzyarzhynsky district, Minsk region.

Prosecutor's office of Minsk region investigated the events around the death of the journalist. Terms of the examination were prolonged several times, but as a result the criminal case was not initiated, having stopped on the version of suicide. OSCE experts that were invited by the Belarusian side for the investigation «...based on evidence and information available to them... came to the conclusion that there was no reason to think that Byabenin was hanged after death," OSCE's report stated.

Meanwhile, many colleagues and friends of Byabenin strongly disagree with the suicide version and believe that it is useless to wait for an objective investigation when under the rule of Aliaksandr Lukashenka.

Journalists emphasize that Byabenin was inside the team of Andrei Sannikau, leader of the civil campaign «European Belarus» and one of Lukashenka's main rivals in elections on December 19. According to the resource, after the elections this team was treated most cruelly

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